

The United Reformed Church
Minutes of a virtual meeting of Mission Council held 10 July 2020

FIRST SESSION

The meeting of Mission Council began at 10.00 with worship led by the Revd David Coaker. The Moderator, Mr Derek Estlin was in the Chair.

20/01

The Moderator welcomed everyone, identifying new members and those attending as alternates

Apologies had been received from the Revd Kevin Watson.

Those attending for the first time or attending in a new capacity were:

The Revd Dr Jason Askew	Synod of Wales Representative
The Revd Martyn Coe	North Western Synod Representative
Ms Lorraine Downer	Thames North Synod Representative
The Revd Gerald England	South Western Synod Representative
Mr Alan Kirby	Southern Synod Representative
Ms Ella Lemon	East Midlands Synod Representative
Mr Tony Obi-Ezekpazu	Thames North Synod Representative
The Revd Geoffrey Clarke	Moderator of East Midlands Synod
The Revd Brian Jolly	Moderator of North Western Synod
The Revd Jamie Kissack	Moderator of Yorkshire Synod
Mr Richard Lockley	West Midlands Synod Representative
The Revd Dr Robert Pope	Convenor of Faith and Order
Ms Karen Campbell	Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries
Ms Jo Harris	Youth Representative
Ms Victoria Turner	Youth Representative

20/02

The Clerk moved Resolutions 32 and 33

Resolution 32 Virtual Meetings
Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council resolves to make the addition to the Rules of Procedure covering Virtual Attendance at Physical Meetings and Virtual Meetings, with immediate effect.

Mission Council agreed.

Resolution 33 Standing Orders for Virtual Meetings
Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council:

- a) redesignates the Standing Orders as “Standing Orders for Physical Meetings”, with immediate effect;
- b) adopts the “Standing Orders for Virtual Meetings”, with immediate effect;
- c) declares, for the avoidance of doubt, that where a majority of those present at a meeting are physically gathered, it shall be a physical meeting conducted according to the Standing Orders for Physical Meetings, and where a majority of those present at a meeting are not physically gathered, it shall be a Virtual Meeting, conducted according to the Standing Orders for Virtual Meetings;
- d) reminds the whole United Reformed Church of the longstanding provision in the Rules of Procedure: “1.3 ...The Standing Orders which are printed in the Book of Reports to General Assembly shall apply to all meetings of the Assembly and Mission Council and, in so far as they are applicable, to meetings of Synods, district councils and their committees.”

Mission Council agreed.

20/03

The General Secretary, the Revd John Proctor proposed the following Resolutions:

- 10-13 Church changes – closures and new causes
- 14-15 Children’s and Youth Work Committee
- 16-18 Communications Committee
- 19 Education and Learning Committee
- 21 Pensions Committee
- 23 Ministries Committee
- 26 Environmental Task Group
- 28 Nominations Committee
- 31 Ministerial Disciplinary Process
- 34 Children’s and Youth Work
- 35 Communications
- 37 Legacies of slavery
- 38 URC 50th anniversary
- 39 Synod nominations to the Mission Committee
- 40 Safeguarding training
- 41 Pattern of committee reporting to the General Assembly
- 42 Contingency plans for next meeting of Mission Council

Mission Council agreed.

The Revd Nigel Uden took the Chair

20/04

Resolution 25 Ministries Committee

Pastoral Supervision

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Paul Whittle, outlined the proposed policy for the implementation of Pastoral Supervision, and moved Resolution 25

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council adopts the policy for pastoral supervision set out on pp1627 of the Book of Reports.

Following discussion, Mission Council agreed.

20/05

Resolution 29 Safeguarding Advisory Group

Safeguarding

The Revd Richard Church reported on the work of the Safeguarding Advisory Group and moved Resolution 29:

- a) Having already endorsed the safeguarding strategic plan-2025, Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, acknowledges that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility in the United Reformed Church.
- b) Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council directs all local churches and synods and those who oversee safeguarding arrangements in the Church to implement the safeguarding arrangements.

b) Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council directs all local churches and synods and those who oversee safeguarding arrangements in the Church to implement the safeguarding strategic plan in ways that promote welfare in the URÇ the well-being of the community in which the Church is placed, and of individuals with whom the church comes into contact.

Mission Council agreed.

20/06

Resolution 27 Mission and Discipleship

Walking the Way

Ms Francis Brienen introduced the Resolution:

Mission Council, in affirming the work of the Walking the Way Steering Group, encourages those who plan the Church's budget to seek ways of funding its continuing work at the level indicated on p202 of the Book of Reports, according to the priorities set out on p205

The General Secretary moved the amendment:

to add the words 'to the end of the calendar year 2021',

Seconded by Mrs Jane Baird.

The amendment was carried.

The amended Resolution 27 was put:

Mission Council, in affirming the work of the Walking the Way Steering Group, encourages those who plan the Church's budget to seek ways of funding its continuing work at the level indicated on p202 of the Book of Reports, according to the priorities set out on pp205, to the end of the calendar year 2021

Resolution 20

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council, being representative of Local Churches, Synods and the whole Church, confirms the Church's commitment to the pensions promises already made, and wishes any consideration of future pension arrangements for the Church's Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, missionaries and staff to keep clearly in mind:

- a) The Church's warm gratitude for the commitment, gifts and service of those who work among us and serve in our name;
- b) The Church's desire to deal with these people honourably in their retirement;
- c) The Church's desire to act as a responsible employer, for the people we employ and for our stipendiary officeholders.

Resolution 22

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council authorises the directors of URC Trust to amend its guarantee of the Ministers' Pension Fund provided to the URC Ministers' Pension Trust in response to the changing regulatory environment, but limited to the available resources of the URC Trust.

There being no discussion, Resolutions 20 and 22 were put.

Mission Council agreed unanimously

20/08

Resolution 30 Wessex Synod

Defibrillators

Mrs Sue Brown, on behalf of Wessex Synod, moved Resolution 30.

- a) Mission Council encourages Elders Meetings and/or Church Meetings to install public defibrillators' on an external wall of their Church buildings, wherever possible.
- b) Mission Council encourages Synods to offer financial support where possible to help churches purchase and install these defibrillators.
- c) Mission Council resolves that, if successful, this initiative be used to mount national and local press campaigns to promote the profile of our churches as safe, caring and compassionate communities.

In discussion, concern was expressed at the timing of the Resolution, given the difficulties being experienced by local churches during the current coronavirus crisis.

The Revd Jay Embrey proposed that the Resolution be not put, seconded by the Revd Peter Stevenson.

Mission Council agreed that the Resolution be not put

The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, took the Chair.

20/09

Address to the Throne

The General Secretary presented the Address to the Throne, and sought Mission Council's approval, on behalf of General Assembly, that it be sent. Mission Council agreed.

20/10

The Moderator thanked the General Secretary, the Assembly Clerk Tasneem Choudhury for arranging the meeting; Andy Jackson and communications, and the team from Affinity for their technical guidance and expertise. In en bloc we noted new mission projects, and closed churches, and they will be noted by General Assembly, as will the retirement of John For and Richard Church. Thanks to them and to those for whom this will be their last Mission Council their current roles

The Revd James Breslin

The Revd Dave Coaker

The Revd Elaine Colechin

The Revd Jacky Enay

The Revd David Gros Miller

Dr Jim Merrilees

The Revd Jenny Mills

The Revd Fiona Thomas

The Revd Kevin Watson

Mr Alan Yates

20/11

Closing worship was led by the Revd Dave Coaker.

Mission Council adjourned at 1435.

APPENDIX I

Conflicts of interest around pension funds at the Mission Council and General Assembly

There are a number of different conflicts of interest around the decision making relating to pension funds.

Ministers¹ who are members of the Ministers Pension Fund, their spouses or civil partners, and their dependent children, have an obvious interest. This interest takes more than one form: some may wish to support a Defined Benefit scheme to protect the guaranteed nature of their pension; however, some may wish to support a move to a Defined Contribution scheme in order to secure their interests through stabilising the long term health and robustness of the Fund.

People who are members of the Lay Staff Pension Fund, their spouses or civil partners, and their dependent children, also have an obvious interest. This interest takes more than one form: some may wish to support a Defined Benefit scheme to protect the guaranteed nature of their pension; however, some may wish to support a move to a Defined Contribution scheme in order to secure their interests through stabilising the long term health and robustness of the Fund.

Anyone who is a member of a local church of the United Reformed Church, including Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, also has an interest because the size of their contributions to the Ministry and Mission Fund will change depending upon which decisions are taken. Some may wish to keep such contributions as low as possible, while others may wish to make a larger contribution in order to maintain or secure what they perceive as a benefit to their minister.

It is important that Decisions made by Mission Council and General Assembly, are in the best interests of the Church and reflect the views of its members, acting in their representative capacities. This is only possible after discussion and consultation amongst its members has taken place. If everyone with a conflict of interest in respect of pensions was removed from the decision making, there would only be a handful of people left. This would not enable effective, representative decision making to take place. It is therefore important that those that have declared and recorded a conflict of interest are included. This will not diminish the decision made.

1. Are you a member of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund, or a spouse or civil partner of a member of the Fund? 51 out of 78

2. Are you a member of the URC Lay Staff Pension Fund, or a spouse or civil partner of a member of the Fund? 9 out of 78

APPENDIX II

Address to the Throne URC Mission Council, July 2020

To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty:

The Mission Council of the United Reformed Church, acting on behalf of its General Assembly, sends loyal greetings to Your Majesty. Grace, mercy, and peace be with you and yours, as ever and ever.